

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3512

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

DIA IMMEDIATE

SECDEF IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 8367

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINR, TH

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE CURRENT CABINET CRISIS

SUMMARY: THE CABINET CRISIS WHICH THE RESIGNATION OF THE SANYA GOVERNMENT CAUSED HAS THRUST THE PROBLEM OF FINDING PRIME MINISTER ON THE KING AND THE NLA. A GOOD POSSIBILITY STILL EXISTS THAT SANYA WILL CHANGE HIS MIND AND AGREE TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT, IF THE KING AND THE POLITICAL PUBLIC PREVAIL UPON HIM TO DO SO. IF SANYA STICKS BY HIS DECISION TO RESIGN, THERE ARE MANY POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS ALTHOUGH NONE OF THEM SEEMS ANXIOUS TO TAKE THE JOB.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK

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AND HIS CABINET NECESSITATES THE FORMATION OF A NEW

CABINET TO CARRY ON THE WORK OF GOVERNING THE COUNTRY UNTIL A PERMANENT CONSTITUTION AND AN ELECTED GOVERNMENT ARE IN PLACE. THE TASK OF FINDING A NEW PRIME MINISTER WILL NOT BE EASY, SINCE SANYA'S EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT IT IS A THANKLESS JOB. PROMINENT OR POLITICALLY AMBITIOUS PERSONS ARE GENUINELY RELUCTANT TO TAKE THE OFFICE, BUT FEW COULD TURN DOWN A DIRECT REQUEST FROM THE KING.

2. ALTHOUGH THE KING MAY CHOOSE TO REMOVE HIMSELF FROM OPEN INVOLVEMENT IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS BY ASKING THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA) TO CHOOSE THE NEW PRIME MINISTER, WE EXPECT THE KING TO PLAY A KEY BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLE IN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT CABINET CRISIS.

3. ALTHOUGH HE SEEMS GENUINELY FED UP WITH THE JOB, SANYA MIGHT CHANGE HIS MIND AND AGREE TO LEAD A NEW GOVERNMENT IF THE KING PREVAILS UPON HIM TO DO SO. THE LIKELIHOOD OF THIS OUTCOME WOULD INCREASE IF A GROUNDSWELL OF SUPPORT FOR SANYA'S CONTINUATION IN OFFICE SHOULD EMERGE IN THE NLA AND THE PRESS. THE NEW SANYA GOVERNMENT COULD BE A SLIGHTLY ALTERED VERSION OF THE PREVIOUS CABINET OR IT COULD INCLUDE IMPORTANT PERSONNEL CHANGES. THE MOST LIKELY LOSERS IN A RESHUFFLE WOULD BE INDUSTRY MINISTER OSOT KOSIN, COMMERCE MINISTER CHANCHAI LITHAWON, AND POSSIBLY DEFENSE MINISTER THAWI CHUNLASAP, ALL OF WHOM HAVE BEEN UNDER ATTACK BY STUDENTS AND THE PRESS.

4. IF SANYA PERSISTS IN HIS DESIRE TO RESIGN, THE SECOND CHOICE OF HIS SUPPORTERS IS JUSTICE MINISTER PRAKOP HUTASING. PRAKOP IS CUT FROM THE SAME MOLD AS SANYA. HE IS A FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME COURT AND LAW PROFESSOR. ALTHOUGH HE IS HIGHLY RESPECTED AS A CHAMPION OF JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE AND A FOE OF CORRUPTION, PRAKOP HAS YET TO DISPLAY STRONG OR DECISIVE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT PRAKOP TO INITIATE ANY IMPORTANT CHANGES IN CURRENT RTG POLICIES SHOULD HE BECOME PRIME MINISTER.

5. BECAUSE HE IS CLOSE TO THE KING AND ENJOYS GREAT POPULARITY IN THE PRESENT NLA, NLA PRESIDENT KHUKRIT PRAMOT

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IS ANOTHER FREQUENTLY MENTIONED CANDIDATE TO SUCCEED SANYA. BUT MANY WHO ADMIRE HIS BRILLIANCE AND WIT FIND IT HARD TO VISUALIZE KHUKRIT AS A PRIME MINISTER. A PROFESSIONAL CYNIC, HE WOULD BE AN ENTERTAINING LEADER BUT AN ERRATIC AND UNPREDICTABLE ADMINISTRATOR. ALTHOUGH HE HAS OCCASIONALLY EXPRESSED HIS IRRITATION WITH U.S. POLICY TOWARD THAILAND IN THE PAST, HIS INSTINCTS ARE CONSERVATIVE AND WE WOULD NOT EXPECT HIM TO CHANGE THAI FOREIGN POLICY GREATLY SHOULD HE BECOME

PRIME MINISTER. KHUKRIT TOLD REPORTERS MAY 21 THAT HE THINKS SANYA SHOULD FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT AND THAT HE HIMSELF PREFERS TO SEEK THE JOB THROUGH ELECTIONS RATHER THAN APPOINTMENT. HE ADMITTED, HOWEVER, THAT HE WOULD TAKE THE JOB NOW IF THE KING INSISTS ON IT.

6. GENERAL KRIT SIWARA IS THE MOST LIKELY MILITARY MAN TO BECOME PRIME MINISTER, BUT HE HAS DECLARED PUBLICLY THAT HE DOES NOT WANT THE JOB. HE RECOGNIZES THAT THE PROBLEMS WHICH FACE THE GOVERNMENT ARE INTRACTABLE, AND THAT STUDENTS WOULD PROBABLY VEHEMENTLY OPPOSE THE APPOINTMENT OF A MILITARY MAN AS PRIME MINISTER. KRIT WOULD ENJOY THE SUPPORT OF THE ARMED FORCES, HOWEVER, AND WOULD THUS BE ABLE TO ACT MORE DECISIVELY THAN A CIVILIAN PRIME MINISTER. HE IS A FIRM SUPPORTER OF CLOSE THAI RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES (SEE BANGKOK A-92).

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

7. LIKE KHUKRIT, DR. PUAJ UNPHAKON ENJOYS POPULARITY WITHIN THE NLA AND AMONG STUDENTS. ALTHOUGH HE IS A NOTED ECONOMIST, HIS POTENTIAL AS A POLITICAL LEADER IS QUESTIONABLE. HE SEEMS TO RECOGNIZE THIS HIMSELF AND PREFERS THE ROLE OF OPINION MOLDER TO THAT OF ADMINISTRATOR. FURTHERMORE, BOTH THE KING AND THE THAI MILITARY WOULD HAVE TROUBLE ACCEPTING PUAJ AS PRIME MINISTER, SINCE HIS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC VIEWS, THOUGH NOT RADICAL BY WESTERN STANDARDS, ARE A LITTLE TOO FAR TO THE LEFT FOR THE CONSERVATIVE THAI ESTABLISHMENT'S TASTE. PUAJ'S SUCCESSION TO THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER WOULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON U.S. INTERESTS, SINCE HE HAS CALLED FOR A "NEUTRAL" FOREIGN POLICY AND THE IMMEDIATE REMOVAL OF U.S. FORCES FROM THAILAND (SEE BANGKOK A-47).

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8. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SUKIT NIMMANHEMIN IS ANOTHER POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR TO SANYA, IF ONLY BECAUSE HE IS HIS CURRENT DEPUTY. HE HAS NOT FUNCTIONED WELL IN THAT ROLE, HOWEVER, AND IS CURRENTLY OUT OF COUNTRY. SUKIT HAS GOOD CREDENTIALS AS A DIPLOMAT, BUT POOR ONES AS AN ADMINISTRATOR. AN ADVOCATE OF A MORE INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY IN THE PAST, SUKIT DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE STRONG FEELINGS FOR OR AGAINST THE U.S. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT SUKIT TO MAKE MAJOR INNOVATIONS IN DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN POLICY SHOULD HE SUCCEED SANYA AS INTERIM PRIME MINISTER. (WE ARE SENDING BY AIRGRAM AN ANALYSIS OF SUKIT'S RATHER BLEAK PRIME MINISTERIAL CHANCES.)

9. "THE NATION" OF MAY 22 REPORTS THAT KASEM CHATIKAWANIT, LEADER OF THE NLA GROUP OF 99, SAYS HE WILL PROPOSE FINANCE MINISTER BUNMA WONGSAWAN AS SANYA'S SUCCESSOR. BUNMA IS ONE OF THE MOST CAPABLE MEMBERS OF THE SANYA GOVERNMENT, BUT HE HAS BEEN THE TARGET OF CRITICISM FROM THE PRESS AND SOME NLA MEMBERS OF THE COUNTRY'S CURRENT ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. HIS DESIRE TO RESIGN BECAUSE OF THIS CRITICISM REPORTEDLY PROVOKED THE CABINET'S MAY 21 DECISION TO RESIGN.

10. A FEW LOCAL NEWSPAPERS HAVE ALSO MENTIONED THANAT KHOMAN AS A PRIME MINISTERIAL POSSIBILITY. HIS WELL-KNOWN OPPOSITION TO THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND WOULD CAUSE US PROBLEMS, BUT WE DO NOT REGARD HIS APPOINTMENT AS A LIKELY POSSIBILITY. THANAT HAS NO REAL POLITICAL BASE, AND HIS TURNABOUT ON THE U.S. FORCES ISSUE SINCE HE LEFT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS EARNED HIM THE RESPECT OF ALMOST NO ONE IN THE THAI POLITICAL PUBLIC. WHEN WE RAISED THANAT'S POSSIBILITIES WITH A KEY OFFICIAL IN THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD, THE REPLY WAS "WHO WOULD BE HIS MINISTERS?"

HE HAS A REPUTATION FOR NOT WORKING HARMONIOUSLY WITH OTHERS, A FATAL FLAW IN MANY SOCIETIES, BUT ESPECIALLY IN THAILAND.

11. IN CONCLUSION, WE BELIEVE THAT SANYA AND PRAKOP ARE THE MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES TO LEAD THE NEXT GOVERNMENT BECAUSE THEY ARE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE THAI POLITICAL SYSTEM. THE OTHER POSSIBILITIES MENTIONED ABOVE ARE LESS LIKELY TO EMERGE AS PRIME MINISTER
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IN AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT BECAUSE ONE OR ANOTHER ELEMENT WOULD LIKELY OPPOSE THEIR SELECTION AND BECAUSE NONE OF THEM REALLY WANTS THE JOB.
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